City of Toronto.
Planning and Development Department.

DESIGNATION OF CERTAIN COMMERCIAL STRIPS EAST OF THE DON VALLEY UNDER SECTION 40 OF THE PLANNING ACT (DEVELOPMENT REVIEW)

April 18, 1983

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[DEVELOPMENT REVIEW - COMMERCIAL STRIPS EAST OF DON VALLEY]

To: Land Use Committee

Subject: Designation of certain commercial strips east of the Don Valley under Section 40 of the Planning Act [Development Review]

Origin: Commissioner of Planning and Development (c71luc82001:141)

Comments:

1. Proposal

This report recommends the introduction of development review for most commercial strips east of the Don Valley. More specifically, I propose to recommend the designation of the following Commercial Strips under Section 40 of The Planning Act (development review):

a) Danforth Avenue

(i) between the Don Valley Parkway and the City Limit;

b) Queen Street East

(i) between the Don Valley and the City Limit;

c) Gerrard Street:

(i) between Munroe Street and Boulton Avenue;

(ii) between Highfield Road and Coxwell Avenue;

d) Broadview Avenue

(i) between Pretoria Avenue and Dearbourne (on east side) and south lot line of 720 Broadview (Dominion Store on west side);

(ii) between Simpson Street and First Avenue on the east side and Mountstephen on the west side;

(iii) between Thompson Street and back lot lines of properties fronting on Queen Street;

e) Pape Avenue:

(i) between 778 1/2 Pape (limit of C1 zoning on west side) and Gertrude Place (on east side) and Harcourt Avenue (south of Danforth);

f) Coxwell Avenue:

(i) North of Gerrard to CNR tracks.

(For an accurate delineation of these areas see attached Map No. 1).

2. The Scope and Meaning of Development Review

Development Review is a planning review measure contained in Section 40 of The Planning Act which authorizes Council to require the submission and approval, prior to the issuance of a building permit, of the following:

(1) plans showing the location of all buildings and structures to be erected, and/or

(2) drawings comprising plan, elevation and cross-section views of industrial and commercial buildings and residential buildings containing 25 or more dwelling units.

These plans and drawings must be sufficient to display the massing and conceptual design of the proposed building(s) and the relationship of the proposed building(s) to adjacent buildings. These plans must also show the location of interior walkways, stairs and escalators to which members of the public have access from streets, open spaces and adjacent walkways in buildings. In addition to these matters the drawings must also show vehicular loading and parking facilities, driveways, exterior walkways, lighting, landscaping, garbage storage and any change in elevation or grading.

In addition, The Planning Act confers on municipalities which have designated areas for development review the authority to require amongst other things, the following:

- land for widening of highways that abut the project site;

- location and design of loading or parking facilities;

- walkways and other means of pedestrian access;

- removal of snow from access ramps and driveways;

- the power under Section 469 of the Municipal Act to enforce any conditions imposed by way of an agreement as a condition of Council's approval of plans.

3. Council's Criteria for Development Review

In April 1982, Council adopted certain criteria to be used in the evaluation of proposals for designating areas for development review. The types of areas that were considered appropriate for development review included:

- areas which have a special identity, such as historical districts, tourist areas and certain commercial strips;

- areas of mixed residential and industrial development;

- areas with a potential for large scale redevelopment such as the St. Lawrence, Frankel Lambert and Harbourfront areas, transport yards, large disused and vacant sites in single ownership;

- areas which are environmentally sensitive, such as parts of the Waterfront and Port areas, wherein there is a diversity of activities;

- areas of natural beauty, including ravines, valleys, and the escarpment, where a considerable amount of development is anticipated;

- areas where matters of access, parking and loading are of concern because of their impact on nearby land uses.

The areas which are to be recommended for designation in this report meet the special identity, parking and loading criteria listed above. In considering the appropriateness of development review for the commercial strips under study the criteria adopted by Council in its April 1982 report have been addressed in this report as follows:

1. The particular characteristics of the area which have prompted the proposal have been clearly identified and public objectives have been enumerated. The areas listed and those where substantial development is anticipated.

2. Those matters which will be the subject of special concern in reviewing applications have been highlighted.

3. The reasons why other forms of control such as the Zoning By-law are inadequate to achieve the objectives set out in (1) above are discussed.

4. Guidelines for new development have been included in the report and will be available to the public when the by-law is passed by City Council.

5. The proposals for development review have been discussed at public meetings held in the areas where development review is proposed.

4. A Case For Development Review

4.1 Advantages for Urban Design

The current zoning and Official Plan provisions for commercial strips do not provide for sufficient review by City Council with respect to matters of access and design of new developments. Development review for those areas will ensure that the development and/or redevelopment of commercial strips east of the Don Valley does not proceed without consideration by Council.

Recent developments have demonstrated that without the ability of Council to review new proposals the integrity of some commercial strips may be jeopardized. For example, the increased use of split level entrances in certain areas has led to discontinuous facades, poor access to shops and disrupted streetscapes. (Split Level Entrances to Retail Uses - February 23, 1981). Split level entrances require additional space for stairs and access ramps and this in turn often encourages building set backs beyond existing adjacent buildings which have at grade access.

Without adequate siting and design review, one poorly designed building out of the design context can have negative effects for commercial property owners and patrons alike. It has been demonstrated in areas of successful commercial activity that the pedestrian environment is an important element in attracting shoppers. Poor design can discourage shoppers and inhibit the revitalization of traditional retail strips.

The zoning by-law is unable to provide individual design control over matters of building location, access and loading facilities for commercial buildings. The proximity of commercial strips to residential areas punctuates the need for greater control over new

development on these strips. Development Review provides a forum for discussion of conceptual design and can ensure a greater compatibility between uses on commercial strips and in the adjacent residential neighbourhoods. Concomitantly, it will ensure that new development on the strips is compatible, both functionally and aesthetically, with the intended purpose of commercial shopping streets.

4.2 Positive Impact on Investment and Redevelopment

Investment and redevelopment in particular residential or commercial areas usually proceeds within a stable or known development environment. Where land use and design matters remain ambiguous or unknown investment may be hindered. This is especially the case on commercial strips where private development must rely on adjacent development investment to ensure its success and associated design guidelines provide that additional certainty to ensure that private investment as well as public space is adequately protected from poor design decisions.

The redevelopment of many commercial strips in the east end of Toronto has been altogether absent. This lack of redevelopment has not been the result of an unwieldy approval process but rather the lack of sufficient markets to warrant expanded commercial space. As well, the cost of land in relation to the redevelopment potential has been prohibitive. The residential density on commercial strips has also been insufficient to spur new commercial-residential projects. The introduction of site plan control cannot by itself lead to renewed investment and redevelopment of commercial strips. At the same time, development review will not inhibit or stop redevelopment where the rate of return is sufficient to encourage investment. In fact redevelopment and investment should be encouraged in a more stable environment where planning measures are in place to ensure that new development is properly regulated for the benefit of adjacent owners and the public at large.

As well, the development review approval process in the east end will not be unduly long and new development will often benefit from the advice offered by City staff. We often possess additional information which will assist the proponent in planning and designing his project.

4.3 The Experience of the City

The City has a number of commercial strips which are now subject to site plan control including all the strips in the Central Core and North Toronto. In addition many commercial strips in other neighbourhoods have already been designated as areas of site plan control (see Map 2). In areas where development has been limited such as north Yonge Street it is hard to evaluate the usefulness of development review. There are a number of sites, however, which could be subject to redevelopment over the next decade and development review could be an important negotiating tool to ensure that redevelopment is directed to a positive advantage.

In areas where redevelopment pressure has been more intense, such as the Annex, development review has been an important element in ensuring the proper street relationship, pedestrian access and siting for buildings on strategic sites. There are examples of successful residential-commercial developments which have been markedly improved by development review. In turn, these successful developments have led to a revitalization of adjacent uses. In the Annex, where most of the residential and commercial areas are designated for development review, the additional work load has been limited. There have been only twelve development review reports associated with commercial strips over the last two years of which six were minor reports. It has become apparent however, that redevelopment without the advantage of development review could have posed significant problems for the commercial strips.

There are a number of examples which demonstrate the importance of development review in ensuring the most beneficial pedestrian and vehicular access, siting and overall design of buildings. Where development review has been absent from commercial strips, there have been instances where redevelopment has been poorly designed affecting negatively both the development itself as well as the pedestrian environment adjacent to the new building. The most dramatic examples of this are developments where the buildings are set back significantly from the front lot line to provide parking in front of the development.

4.4 The Experience of Other Municipalities

It is worth noting that a number of municipalities in southern Ontario have implemented development review as

an important supplement to their zoning by-laws throughout wide areas of their jurisdiction. Eight municipalities were canvassed to seek their experience and use of site plan control. Six replies were received and of these six replies five municipalities use development review extensively, including for the control of commercial strips. The municipalities of Ottawa, Oakville, Hamilton, East York and Scarborough all incorporate development review as a part of the approval process for new development on their commercial strips. The City of Nork York uses development review on a more limited basis for rezonings and the Yonge Street Centre Area. However, North York is currently studying the use of design guidelines for its retail and service commercial areas.

In the majority of these municipalities development review has been delegated to a committee of council. Apparently, the reaction from the development industry has not been negative and the approval process has become an accepted procedure.

5. Problem Areas To Be Addressed By Development Review

The functional and design characteristics of east end commercial strips are discussed below to illustrate the problems which have occurred from the lack of adequate planning control. A more detailed description of the character of each commercial strip for which development review is proposed is contained in Appendix A to this report.

Along some of the commercial strips east of Broadview Avenue, the architectural and design attributes of existing buildings are not the primary consideration. Much of the built form consists of two and three storey commercial and residential buildings. Many of the properties which front onto the commercial strips are underutilized and offer potential for redevelopment.

In some cases street related facades consist of long stretches of blank concrete or brick walls. There are instances of driveways and loading bay accesses onto the commercial streets which interrupt sidewalks. New developments have in some cases provided parking in front of new buildings with substantial setbacks from the street. This is out of keeping with the adjacent building setbacks and is a further disruption to the street related pedestrian environment.

These characteristics should be discouraged. In particular, disruptions to a consistent street frontage created by split-

level entrances, recessed entranceways, boulevard parking areas and excessive setbacks should be avoided. One storey buildings should also be discouraged, so as to provide a greater continuity of the built form along commercial strips.

Many of the commercial strips in east Toronto do not provide the necessary amenities to compete with more centrally located shopping opportunities. With the exception of portions of Danforth Avenue and Gerrard Street the traditional shopping streets have suffered from insufficient capital investment and inadequate consumer demand. Consequently these shopping areas are visually unattractive, poorly maintained and discourage an active pedestrian environment.

6. General Design Guidelines

To provide direction for development under the provisions of Section 40 a number of general guidelines are presented below. It is intended that these guidelines will be made available to architects and builders active in the east end of the City.

Each commercial street in the east end possesses certain unique characteristics which cannot necessarily be recognized by general design guidelines. In such cases it will be incumbent upon the planners to ensure that these characteristics are respected and enhanced where desirable. The general design guidelines provide the necessary design context within which site specific concerns can be addressed.

6.1 Relationship of the Proposed Building to Adjacent Buildings and the Street

(a) Vehicular access for parking and loading purposes should be provided from the rear where possible.

EXPLANATION: Vehicles should not cross the sidewalk since this severely detracts from the pedestrian environment of the street. Parking and loading should be at the rear, where possible, to allow uninterrupted pedestrian flow, less visual interference with respect to the streetscape as well as normal traffic movement.

(b) Sideyards normally should not be provided, and if provided should be less than 1.5 metres in width.

EXPLANATION: A pedestrian shopping street is strengthened if there is a continuous or nearly continuous facade. Most existing commercial

buildings east of the Don Valley do not have sideyards.

(c) Buildings generally should not be set back from the front lot line or where desired the setback should be no greater than the average distance of the building on either side.

EXPLANATION: A uniform setback will provide continuity to the streetscape. Where it is clearly demonstrated that a different setback will enhance the pedestrian environment and will not adversely effect the streetscape then a variation from the guideline may be permitted.

(d) Buildings in CR zones should conform to the standards proposed in the report Light, View and Privacy Standards prepared by the Planning Board and adopted by Council in April 1981.

EXPLANATION: These are general guidelines to ensure sufficient light, view and privacy for residential units in CR districts.

(e) The retail frontage should be designed to maximize window display areas and/or outside areas for merchandise display.

(f) Projects on sites with wide frontages should be designed to accommodate, or at least reflect the scale of small, individual storefronts, ie. 4.5 to 6 metres (15 to 20 feet) wide.

EXPLANATION: Guidelines (e) and (f) will encourage an active and interesting commercial streetscape. It is important that street facades maintain a scale which will encourage an inviting pedestrian environment.

(g) In areas where commercial or industrial uses are adjacent to residential uses and to ensure that the noise and fumes from the proposed non-residential uses do not unduly affect nearby houses:

EXPLANATION: Vehicular access to parking, servicing and garbage collection areas should be set back a reasonable distance from the lot line abutting an existing house, or alternatively, adequately screened or enclosed.

6.2 Massing and Conceptual Design

(a) The main floor should be located at grade or within .3 metres from grade and below grade commercial space should not be directly accessible from the street.

EXPLANATION: Most existing stores have retail uses at grade which provide an interesting visual experience for the pedestrian. Split level commercial uses render the whole building inaccessible to the handicapped and in addition the access area to below grade retail is often an unsightly garbage trap and a loitering area. In many instances, below grade retail space does not provide good pedestrian marketing ability since window displays are not clearly visible. Also, the upper stores are elevated above grade and set back from the street line resulting in similar marketing problems.

7. Implementation and Staffing Implications

At various public meetings held to discuss the Part II Official Plan studies the prospect of development review for certain commercial strips was raised. After an explanation of the development review process and its potential benefits for the community, local residents have generally responded favourably to such proposals. As the Official Plan Part II studies may not receive approval for another year or more early approval of development review measures would ensure that adequate protection is provided while the Part II studies are in process.

Alterations, such as minor additions of less than 139 square metres, will be exempt from development review. Consequently, the introduction of development review need not imply a substantial increase to the work loads of City staff. In fact, an analysis of all 1981 building permits for South Riverdale demonstrated that only 3 developments on commercial strips in that year would have been subject to development review. This small number of eligible projects is derived from a total of 71 building permit applications that were received for the areas of Queen Street East, Gerrard Street East and Broadview Avenue, proposed for development review. It should be noted, however, that there may be some additional staff time required to determine whether or not a particular building permit application should be subject to development review. Although the number of applications that will require review is anticipated to be small, the incremental effect of

poorly designed or inappropriate development on commercial strips can be permanently damaging. Commercial strips, although privately owned, are a public resource which if properly controlled will benefit both property owners and the public.

8. Conclusions

The commercial-retail strips east of the Don Valley provide a number of unique commercial shopping environments for local and Metropolitan residents. Some of these streets are undergoing both physical and cultural transformations which require specific planning consideration to ensure they continue to develop as exciting and commercially successful shopping environments.

A number of municipalities throughout southern Ontario have taken advantage of existing planning control legislation and applied development review to large areas of commercial and industrial development with positive results. A preliminary analysis of the anticipated work load from the introduction of development review suggests that the number of applications would be small and would not present a substantial increase in existing work loads for area planners, however the incremental effect on the streetscape of a few poorly situated developments could create significant problems.

It is proposed that a number of design guidelines capable of application for all the streets discussed in Appendix A accompany the introduction of development review. Development review will offer much needed control over the siting, conceptual design and landscaping of new developments. This will ensure that the positive attributes of the existing strips are maintained and encouraged through new development.

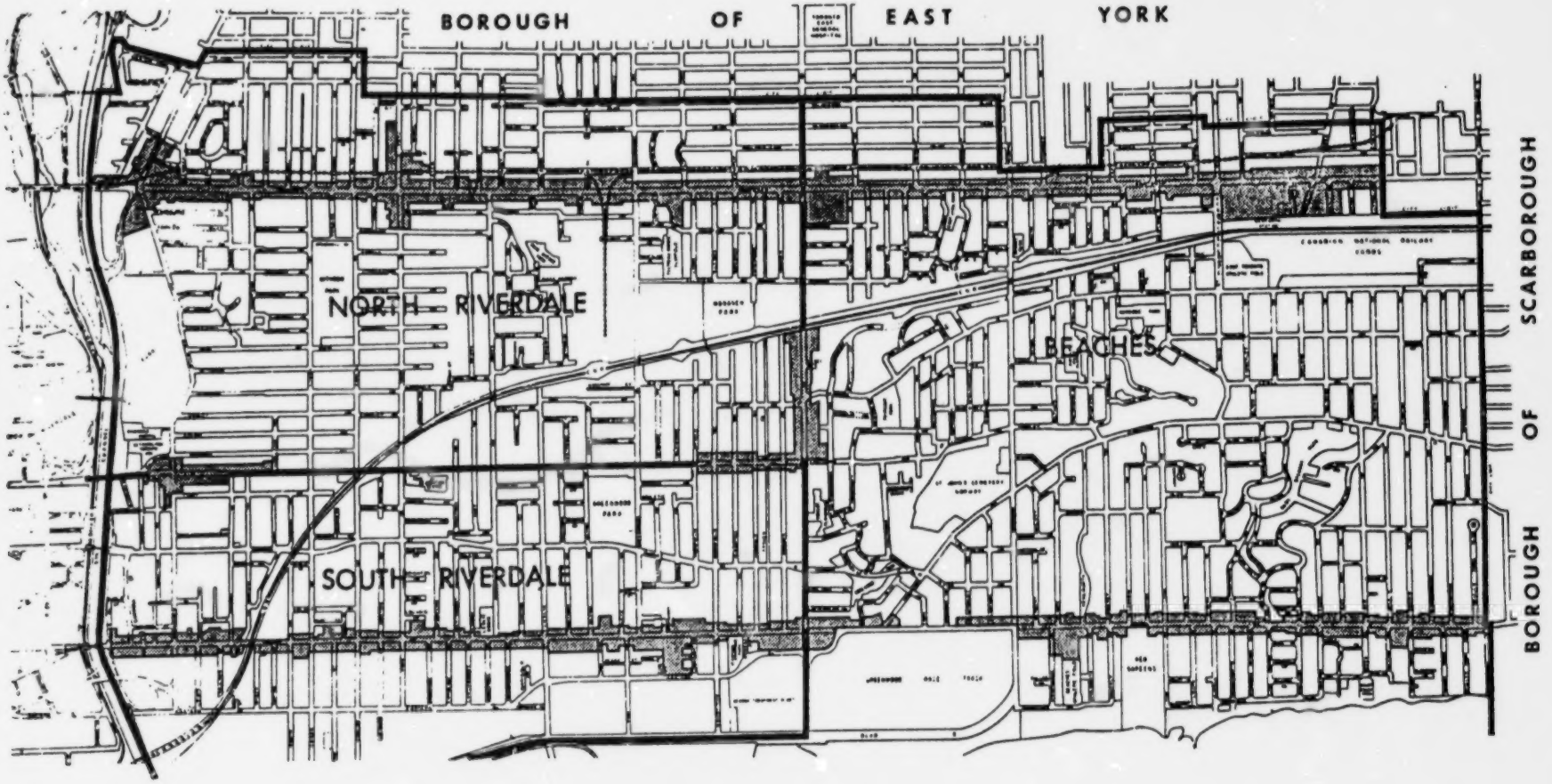
RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That your Committee request the City Solicitor to submit a draft by-law, in consultation with the Commissioner of Planning and Development, designating those commercial strips east of the Don Valley as shown on Map 1, as areas of Site Plan Control in accordance with Section 40 of The Planning Act.

2. That your Committee adopt the guidelines contained in Section 6 of this report.

Stephen G. McLaughlin
Commissioner

:KM/vk



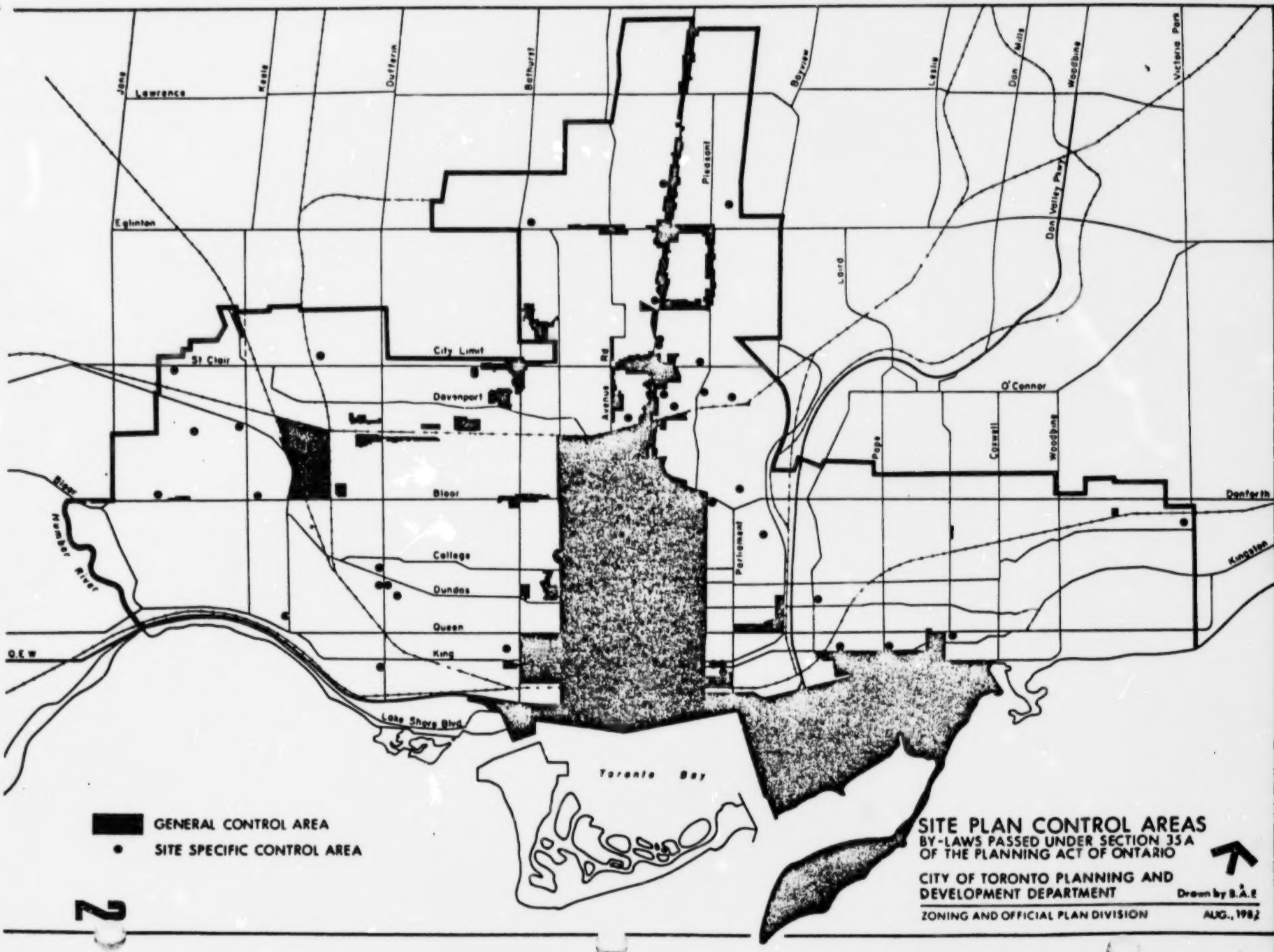
PROPOSED DESIGNATION OF SITE PLAN CONTROL AREAS

ASSIGNMENT No. 634/02004

CITY OF TORONTO PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

COMMUNITY AND NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING DIVI.

MAY, 1982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Victoria Park
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Laird
St Clair
City Limit
Davenport
Avenue Rd
O'Connor
Pape
Coxwell
Woodbine
Bloor
Danforth
Humber River
College
Parliament
Kingston
Dundas
Queen
King
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CITY OF TORONTO PLANNING AND
DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT
Drawn by B.A.E
ZONING AND OFFICIAL PLAN DIVISION
AUG., 1982

APPENDIX A

Each of the commercial strips proposed for designation under Section 40 of The Planning Act are discussed below. Peculiarities of each strip are identified and particular design characteristics are presented. Specific concerns identified will further support the rationale for the introduction of development review in these areas.

1. Queen Street

Queen Street consists primarily of storefront retail uses with some pockets of residential uses. The existing built form, for the most part, is not of architectural or historical significance, with the exception of the area between Broadview Avenue and the CNR right-of-way.

There are instances of driveways and loading bay accesses along Queen Street which contribute to an unpleasant pedestrian environment. In some cases street related facades consist of blank walls or irregular setbacks from the street.

It is the objective of development review to establish guidelines which will contribute to a more cohesive and pleasing pedestrian environment. The additional planning controls provided for under Section 40 of The Planning Act will help to alleviate the negative design features of the built form in certain areas of Queen Street East.

Queen Street East between Woodbine and the City Limit, contrary to the streetscape further to the west, is the centre of thriving retail and business activities. One of the most attractive features of this shopping street is its village like atmosphere. The area is enhanced by the scale and form of existing buildings. Without inhibiting new building forms the special features of this commercial street should be preserved and maintained.

The closely built frontages and the rather small size of stores provide a desirable continuity for pedestrian shoppers. Also the local nature of these stores seems to encourage pedestrian movement along the sidewalks. The pedestrian dominated sidewalks then, have very little space to offer for outside displays or sitting places. However, where appropriate, sidewalk cafes find places at street corners. It is necessary, therefore, to discourage conflict created by

occasional driveways. Conversely, it is appropriate to encourage the use of rear lanes for access purposes.

2. Danforth Avenue

The Danforth has traditionally provided a focus in east Toronto for social and commercial activity. Its many shops and offices serve a mainly local clientele. Besides providing immediate goods and services for purchase, Danforth plays an important role as an area of social interaction. With its fairly wide sidewalks and profusion of sights and sounds, the Danforth has long been used as a promenade and informal meeting area. Future development along the Danforth should complement and enhance both the commercial and social functions of the street. In addition, the Danforth presently has a significant residential component in the form of above-store apartments and a small number of entirely residential buildings. New development also should be sensitive to the needs and concerns of the people who live along the street.

The characteristics of Danforth Avenue change over its length, sometimes undergoing a transition within a relatively short distance. This diversity results both form variations in the physical form and masses of the structures which line the street and form shifts in human activity related to the use of these buildings. While it is important to promote development which generally strengthens the commercial, social and residential roles mentioned above, we should appreciate the fact that much of the attractiveness of Danforth is due to its richness of variety and complexity. Visual and functional contradictions are not necessarily undesirable and design guidelines should not, therefore, impose a bland uniformity on the streetscape.

Danforth from Broadview to Coxwell, and particularly within a few blocks of the Pape intersection, is characterized by a "town market" atmosphere. In large part this feeling derives from the ethnic nature of the shops and services. The market image is promoted by a number of characteristics: a generous offering of open sidewalk displays; a large number of canvas awnings; a fairly wide boulevard that is well-travelled by pedestrians; a predominance of retail and personal service uses at grade and directly accessible from the sidewalk; large display areas on generally narrow frontages; the presence of residents living directly above the street activity. Site plan control should be applied to encourage massing, siting and design characteristics that contribute to this market image.

There are some elements of the present streetscape along Danforth which detract from the desired "town market" atmosphere. These characteristics should be discouraged. In particular, disruptions to a consistent street frontage created by split-level entrances, recessed entranceways, boulevard parking areas and excessive setbacks should be deterred. Extensive, unvaried frontages, or building facades devoid of openings, are to be avoided. One-storey buildings should also be discouraged. Finally, single use buildings are generally less desirable than multi-use structures.

3. Gerrard Street

The areas proposed for site plan control represent two somewhat unique ethnic commercial shopping districts. These retail strips are currently undergoing considerable revitalization and redevelopment. It is important to ensure that the opportunities presented by new development are siezed upon and directed toward positive design improvements.

The portion of Gerrard Street between Munroe Street and Boulton Avenue has recently become a commercial centre characterized by Chinese and Indonesian businesses. Retail activity is particularly strong on weekends when non-resident shoppers patronize this area from as far away as Scarborough. Like Chinatown in many respects, such uses as Chinese restaurants, dry good stores, vegetable stores and other similar outlets are increasing their presence.

This commercial strip, as with similar such retail shopping areas, boasts a profusion of multicoloured commercial signs, often with Chinese characters. Split-level entrances have been constructed in some of the new buildings. In this regard, while these entrances are generally discouraged they may be appropriate in this area. However, it should be noted that, if this commercial strip fails to continue its commercial redevelopment, such entrances will generally hinder retail potential for those shops above and below grade. It is also necessary to ensure that in the event of split level entrances, that they are designed in an appropriate fashion.

The five blocks of Gerrard Street immediately to the west of Coxwell Avenue also form a culturally unique social and commercial focus. Again, there is something of a market atmosphere - on a busy weekend afternoon the street is transformed into a veritable South Asian bazar. In order to promote this sort of street image, we would want to foster many of the same design amenities identified in the discussion of other commercial strips. Maximization of ground floor display areas within designs reflecting a scale of small,

individual frontages; visually interesting uses located at grade; and the mixing of residential and commercial uses within a single building should all be encouraged. Conversely, discordant elements such as disruptions to the alignment of buildings (by split-level entrances, boulevard parking, etc.), extensive unvaried frontages, and one-storey buildings should be avoided.

An important consideration which applies to Gerrard Street near Coxwell is the capacity of the boulevard to handle peak pedestrian traffic flow. Unlike many commercial strips, a large portion of the Gerrard Street clientele is not local but originates from neighbourhoods throughout east Toronto and Metro. Consequently, the patrons of Gerrard Street tend to gather along the strip on weekends, rather than spread their trips evenly throughout the week. The result is high levels of pedestrian traffic for relatively brief periods of time. Due to this periodic congestion, building designs which severely constrict pedestrian flow along the boulevard upon which they front should be closely scrutinized. While it is desirable to stimulate a street market feeling along Gerrard, this should not be done at the expense of pedestrian safety or convenience of movement. Certainly if opportunities exist to widen the sidewalk while maintaining a harmonious streetscape, these should be pursued.

4. Coxwell Avenue

Further north on Coxwell, above Gerrard Street East, there are other reasons for establishing site plan control and hence different design criteria to be examined.

Coxwell Avenue between Gerrard Street and the CNR tracks is characterized by a number of competing general use types. The aim of site plan control along this strip, therefore, is not to promote a consistent streetscape, since the potential does not really exist, but rather, to ensure that potentially conflicting uses do not adversely impinge one upon the other. The main concern here is to protect the integrity of residential uses from excessive encroachment by commercial uses nearer lower Gerrard Street and around the Fairford/Upper Gerrard intersection; and from industrial uses nearer the CNR tracks.

Since the current zoning allows considerably higher density for industrial and commercial properties than that permitted for residential lot, overshadowing is a potential problem. To mitigate this possible problem buildings which are situated near houses should be sited in such a way as to minimize shadow casts throughout the year. The same standards should

apply to protect any existing or future areas of public open space from overshadowing.

Consistent with this same goal of protecting the quality of the immediate environment for residential properties, vehicular access and service areas should be either screened or sufficiently separated from abutting residential or community and recreational uses in order that noise, odour and visual impacts are reduced.

Finally, the two blocks between lower Gerrard Street and the CNR tracks are quite long. East-west movements of pedestrians is discouraged by this elongated block pattern. Some of the commercial and industrial frontages along Coxwell are quite extensive, however. Consequently, new projects on larger sites should be encouraged to provide walkways which could allow east-west pedestrian access.